

# The Washington Post

## In 'Flurries' of Plastic, Possible Need Is Seen For Stronger Regulation

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Two Montgomery County council members, concerned about the spewing of plastic foam particles from a Bethesda construction site, yesterday asked county officials to consider strengthening the county's environmental laws.

The request from Roger Berliner (D-Potomac-Bethesda) and George L. Leventhal (D-At Large) came after The Washington Post reported yesterday that county environmental officials had made at least eight site visits since late March and had imposed \$1,500 in fines on Donohoe Construction because of the problem.

But it was not until the county threatened to revoke Donohoe Construction's building permit that the company made significant changes in its construction practices at the Hilton Garden Inn on Waverly Street in downtown Bethesda, county records show.

"Based on the briefings we have been provided and the published press accounts," the county's approach "did not prove effective," Berliner and Leventhal said in a letter to county officials.

The particles are created during a process known as "rasping," which involves the sanding of an insulating material attached to the building's walls.

County officials have said the particles do not threaten public health, although they are small enough to be inhaled or swallowed or become lodged in the eyes.

Steven J. Van Dorpe, Donohoe's development director, said in an e-mail that the firm is cooperating "with local officials and working closely with . . . County Inspectors to ensure additional measures to minimize debris are implemented immediately and throughout the remainder of the project."


County law requires builders to take "reasonable precautions" to minimize airborne pollution.

Bob Hoyt, the county's environmental protection director, sent inspectors to the site yesterday. The inspectors told a company official to make better use of netting to block dispersal of the particles and to cover a dumpster that particles were escaping from, Hoyt said.

He said the company had been responsive. "What we have seen is continued efforts by the contractor to do everything he can to prevent the dispersal of Styrofoam off the site, " Hoyt said.

Early yesterday, Leventhal asked county officials to order the company to stop work at the site until

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more efforts are made to reduce the dispersal of particles. Occupants of nearby office buildings reported continued "flurries" and in some cases "blizzards" of the particles flying off the building.

In recent weeks, office workers around the site and a county inspector have documented piles of the particles throughout the area, including some that have landed several blocks away at a school, and in a nearby stream on the Georgetown Branch walker-biker trail.

Hoyt said he did not plan to halt construction at this time. "The company is trying to work with us," he said.

Donohoe officials in early April promised to take steps to minimize the dispersal of the material and to clean it up, but inspectors said they were not doing enough

County records and interviews with occupants of nearby offices show that throughout April and early this month, fine dust and bits of plastic foam were often seen in downtown Bethesda.

A county inspector, Susan Allen, visited the site several times, documenting the company's failure to comply with requests to clean up the area and minimize particles and dust. Hoyt said she has now been assigned to visit the site daily to assess the company's efforts.

The county has four environmental inspectors; a fifth position is vacant.

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